The Making Of ANTIC: The Atari 8-Bit Podcast

By Kay Savetz

I suppose the 30-year-old Atari/Commodore rivalry is partly responsible for the first Atari podcast.

I never particularly wanted to host a podcast, but I did want *someone* to create a podcast about Atari 8-bit computers that I could listen to. In April 2013, my friend Earl Evans, a devout Commodore lover, announced that he would be hosting a podcast called Chicken Lips Radio, which would be all about Commodore computers. I thought to myself: if there's going to be a Commodore podcast, there has to be an Atari podcast too. We can't let the Commodore people enjoy a podcast when we Atari people didn't have one.

Other Atari lovers were apparently thinking the same thing. Randy Kindig put the call out on Twitter, asking who was interested in doing an Atari podcast. Brad Arnold and I both responded, and before we knew it, we three decided that we would, together, create an all-Atari podcast. It would be called ANTIC.

(Ironically, the first episode of ANTIC was released before the first episode of Chicken Lips Radio. . . and Earl hasn't found time to release a second episode. Atari beats Commodore, as usual. You can hear Earl as a regular on the Retro Computing Roundtable podcast at rcrpodcast.com.)

Kay Savetz, Brad Arnold, and Randy Kindig in 2014

So, the podcast has three hosts: myself, Randy, and Brad. Randy also hosts the Floppy Days podcast (floppydays.com). Each Floppy Days episode is devoted to one vintage computer, in the order they were originally released. Brad is president of the Atlanta (Georgia) Historical Computing Society, the group that puts on the annual Vintage Computer Festival Southeast event.

ANTIC is published monthly, in English. (Sorry, German Pro(c) readers.) We start each episode by chatting about what Atari-related activities we've been up to. I love that the podcast "forces" me to play with my Atari machines — something I always want to do, but work and kids and life can get in the way. Knowing that a podcast deadline is looming and that I'll need to have something interesting to talk about makes me make time to play. Next, we talk about Atari 8-bit news (there's a surprising amount of Atari 8-bit news every month) and play an old Atari commercial. Each episode, we highlight and discuss one piece of software, one piece of hardware, and one Atari web site.

Next comes the interviews, which are my favorite part. Although it isn't a hard-and-fast rule, Randy tends to interview "modern" people who are currently doing things with Ataris, such as Curt Vendel; and I tend to interview people from "back in the day" — folks who worked at Atari, or produced software or magazines for those computers. I've interviewed the publisher of Antic Magazine, Chris Crawford (Eastern Front: 1941), and Fernando Herrera (Astro Chase), among others.

The interviews are my favorite part because — for me — it's where the podcast changes from something that's simply fun into something that preserves the history of Atari computing. For example, I talked to a fellow — not some big name that you've heard of, just some guy who worked in Atari's computer division for a year or two. He remembers things about Atari modem internals, and problems they had with DTMF encoding. He recalls details about a product that he designed for Atari, but was never released. People like him share their memories, often revealing facts and stories that no one else knew.

Often the interviews are so interesting (and go so long) that I make an edited version for the podcast. The complete, unedited versions go up on archive.org for die-hard

Atari fans, and perhaps they'll be useful as primary source material for future historians and researchers.

In addition, I ask the people that I interview if they still have any source code, or software that was never released. Occasionally, they do. If they do, they often choose to share it with the Atari community. The interviews can unearth information and software that has never been public before, and I love having a hand in that.

I came up with the name ANTIC, in homage to the custom Atari chip and the magazine of the same name. The other name that we seriously considered was "Colleen and Candy" — but we decided that that might be too obscure for the casual retrocomputing user. Since then, a listener asked why we didn't call the podcast Pokey, after the machine's sound chip (it being an audio podcast, after all) and I had to admit, well, we hadn't thought of that.

According to the data provided by our hosting platform, a typical episode of ANTIC is downloaded 1,600 to 1,800 times. We can't tell how many of those are people who listen to the episodes all the way through, but I am, frankly, astounded that every episode of our niche podcast is downloaded so many times. When we started, I would have been pleasantly surprised if we had 100 regular listeners. But it appears that the community of people who are devoutly interested in these computers is far bigger, and I am thrilled to be part of it. I'm glad that other people still love Atari computers as much as I do.

ANTIC is devoted entirely to the Atari 8-bit machines. Occasionally we stray into other territory, but we try to correct our course and remain true to the 8-bits. Sometimes we'll talk about the 5200 or 7800 video game systems, since they're based on similar hardware. We don't talk about the 2600: there are other podcasts about that. If someone wants a podcast about the Atari ST, or Jaguar, or Lynx: we encourage you to create it. We'll listen.

Because the three hosts live far away from each other, we record the podcast using Skype. We have experimented with different methods for recording and editing, and are settling into a method that allows us to make a podcast that sounds reasonably good without too much effort. It helps that, as we've gotten to know each other better over the past year, we hosts have become more comfortable with each other. So the recent podcasts feel more relaxed than the first few stiff episodes.

Another Atari 8-bit podcast started up very recently, called, not Pokey, but Player/Missile. (www.playermissile.com) Rob McMullen, the host of that podcast, does two things in each episode. First, he goes through computer magazines chronologically, starting in 1979 when the Atari 400 and 800 were released, talking about the Atari-

related articles that appeared therein. Then, he reviews a game that was released in the time period covered in that episode. Because there's very little overlap in topics. Player/Missile is a wonderful complement to what we do in ANTIC. (We three hosts of ANTIC love finally being able to hear an Atari podcast that isn't any work for us.)

You can listen to ANTIC and read the show notes at AtariPodcast.com. Or, subscribe in your favorite podcast app.

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First published in Pro(c) Magazine in 2014.

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